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Message Text

SECRET

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O 151337Z APR 76
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9607

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 3374

NODIS

FOR SECRETARY FROM BROWN

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINTVN LE, PLO
SUBJ: LEBANESE POLITICAL SPECTRUM AS OF 15 APRIL

1. I HAVE BEEN TRANSMITTING TO YOU OVER THE LAST SEVERAL DAYS VARIOUS BITS AND PIECES WHICH, TAKEN TOGETHER, PROVIDE A PICTURE OF WHERE VARIOUS PARTIES TO LEBANESE CRISIS STAND AT THIS MOMENT IN TIME. I SUSPECT, HOWEVER, THAT YOU (LIKE ME) MIGHT BETTER BE ABLE TO TELL THE PLAYERS WITH A PROGRAM AND HAVE THEREFORE PREPARED THE FOLLOWING SPECTRAL ANALYSIS OF LEBANESE POLITICAL SCENE AS I SEE IT.

2. CHRISTIAN/RIGHT: THERE ARE SOME NUANCES AMONG THE POSITIONS OF CHRISTIAN (PREDOMINANTLY MARONITE) ELEMENTS, BUT THESE DO NOT APPEAR TO BE AS SUBSTANTIAL AS THEY MAY ONCE HAVE BEEN. BETWEEN THEM, GEMAYEL, CHAMOUN, FRANGIE (AS LONG AS HE IS PRES.) AND KASSIS OF MARONITE MONKS, CAN PROBABLY CONTROL AND DIRECT UP TO SEVENTY PERCENT OF LEBANON'S CHRISTIAN POPULATION. THESE INDIVIDUALS ACCEPT THE NECESSITY FOR FRANGIE'S RESIGNATION UNDER ORDERLY PROCEDURES AND WELCOME SYRIAN INTERVENTION (INCLUDING MILITARY) WHICH THEY REGARD AS DIRECTED AGAINST JUMBLATT AND THEIR ADVERSARIES. WHILE THE EVENTS OF THE LAST ROUND AND REVERSES SUFFERED BY CHRISTIAN ARMED FORCES HAD INITIAL SOBERING EFFECT ON MARONITE
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LEADERSHIP, INCLINING THEM TO VIEW SOCIO-POLITICAL REFORM

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IN SOMEWHAT MORE SYMPATHETIC LIGHT, CHASTENING EFFECT HAS ALREADY WORN OFF TO SOME DEGREE WITH TIME. COUPLED WITH WHAT THEY REGARD AS SYRIAN POLICY SUPPORTIVE OF THEIR POSITION, THEIR FLEXIBILITY WILL PROBABLY BE REDUCED IF POLITICAL PROCESS DOES NOT MOVE RAPIDLY. IT SHOULD NEVER BE FORGOTTEN, FURTHERMORE, THAT CHRISTIAN/ RIGHT HAS ITS OWN "REJECTIONISTS" WHO WOULD BE SORELY TEMPTED TO ATTEMPT TO BLOCK OUT WHAT THEY REGARDED AS CHRISTIAN SELL-OUT. ONE OR BOTH OF THESE FACTORS MAY HAVE PLAYED A PART IN APPARENT CHRISTIAN DECISION NIGHT APRIL 14-15 TO OPEN LIMITED OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS ON SEVERAL COMBAT FRONTS.

3. CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS: TRADITIONAL MUSLIM LEADER-SHIP (BOTH SUNNI AND SHIITE) HAVE BEEN AMOUNG BIGGEST LOSERS IN LAST YEAR'S EVENTS. WHILE THEY HAVE MADE SOME EFFORTS TO ORGANIZE THEMSELVES TO GET BACK IN THE GAME, SUCH INDIVIDUALS HAVE LOST MUCH OF THEIR INFLUENCE TO MUSLIM "FIGHTERS" OF THE QULAYLAT, KHATIB ILK. WHILE THESE MUSLIM ESTABLISHMENT FIGURES HAVE SOME ULTIMATE INTERESTS IN COMMON WITH ESTABLISHMENT CHRISTIANS, THEY ARE ALSO AWARE THAT THEY MUST RUN WITH THE MUSLIM PACK IF THEY ARE TO SURVIVE POLITICALLY. WITHIN THIS GROUP, PREVIOUS TRIPARTITE ALLIANCE WHICH SALAM AND PRIMIN KARAME HAD ESTABLISHED WITH RAYMOND EDDE APPEARS TO BE PASSE. KARAME IS NOW STRONG ADVOCATE OF SUBSTANTIAL SYRIAN ROLE, WHILE SALAM HAS MOVED TOWARD JUMBLATT IN OPPOSITION TO THIS DEVELOPMENT. SALAM AND LARGE SEGMENT OF CONSERVATIVE MUSLIM OPMKION ALSO FIND EDDE ATTRACTIVE CANDIDATE TO REPLACE FRANGIE; KARAME HAS BEEN EXTREMELY RETICENT ON THIS ISSUE. WHILE BULK OF THIS GROUP UNQUESTIONABLY WOULD PREFER EXPEDI-TIOUS SOLUTION IN LEBANON, THEY ARE UNWILLING AND/OR UNABLE TO STAKE OUT POSITIONS INDEPENDENT OF JUMBLATT-LED LEFTIST/MUSLIM COALITION.

4. SHIITE IMAM MUSA SADR: IMAM MUSA DESERVES A NICHE ALL TO HIMSELF. HE HAS COME UPON THE SCENE WITHIN THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS AND CANNOT BE COUNTED AMONG ESTABLISH-MENT LEADERS, BUT AT SAME TIME HE HAS ESTABLISHED HIM-

SELF A MAJOR FIGURE AMONG LEBANON'S LARGEST (AND POOREST) MINORITY AND, THEREFORE, AS A VOICE FOR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE. IMAM MUSA HAS BEEN RELATIVELY INACTIVE IN RECENT CLASHES AND HIS SHIITE TRIBESMEN HAVE BEEN CONSPICUOUSLY ABSENT FROM MAJOR BATTLEFIELDS. HE IS SERIOUSLY CONCERNED ABOUT RADICAL (COMMUNIST, IRAQI BAATH, ETC.) INROADS AMONG SHIITE POPULATIONS, PARTICULARLY IN THE SOUTH AND, THEREFORE, MAINTAINS SOME DISTANCE

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BETWEEN HIMSELF AND THE LEFT. AT THE SAME TIME, HE SUSPECTS (PROBABLY RIGHTLY) THAT SUNNIS DO NOT INTEND TO SHARE GAINS EQUITABLY WITH THE SHIITES. IT APPEARS, CONSEQUENTLY, THAT IMAM MUSA HAS ALLIED HIMSELF IN SOME FASHION WITH KINDRED ALAWITE REGIME IN DAMASCUS AND WILL SUPPORT SYRIAN INITIATIVES AT LEAST BY PASSIVITY.

5. LEBANESE "PROGRESSIVES": LEBANESE LEFT, FOR WHICH JUMBLATT IS TITULAR HEAD AND SPOKESMAN, IS REALLY HODGE-PODGE OF GROUPS AND MILITIAS, MANY WITH EXTERNAL SUPPORT AND DIRECTION. RECENT FIGHTING IN WHICH THIS GAGGLE, WITH AND ONLY WITH FATAH/PLO SUPPORT, INFLICTED REVERSES ON PHALANGE, ETC. IN BEIRUT AND THE METN HAS PROBABLY LEFT "PROGRESSIVES" WITH EXAGGERATED ESTIMATION OF THEIR MILITARY POWER IN PURELY LEBANESE CONTEXT AND HAS CERTAINLY MADE JUMBLATT AND HIS ALLIES LESS AGREEABLE TO COMPROMISE WITH CHRISTIAN/RIGHT. RECENT INFUSION OF SYRIAN-CONTROLLED ORCES AND PRES. ASSAD'S SPEECH HAVE THROWN JUMBLATT AND HIS LEBANESE ASSOCIATES INTO NEAR-PANIC, WITH PROBABLE EFFECT THAT THOSE WHO CAN WILL SEEK TO OPEN LINES TO DAMASCUS (WE HAVE SOME REPORTS THAT QULAYLAT IS ALREADY SEEKING DISCREET MEANS OF CONTACTING PRES. ASSAD) AND THOSE WHO CAN'T WILL BE DRAWN INTO EVEN CLOSER ALLIANCE. JUMBLATT, AND PROBABLY OTHER LEFTIST LEADERS AS WELL,

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9608

S E C R E T FINAL SECTION OF 2 BEIRUT 3374

NODIS

FOR SECRETARY FROM BROWN

RECOGNIZE THAT THEIR TRADITIONAL CLOSE LINKS WITH PLO/

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FATAH HAVE BECOME EVEN MORE VITAL WITH SYRIANS ON
THEIR DOORSTEP AND ARE WORKING ASSIDUOUSLY TO CULTIVATE
AND MAINTAIN THIS LINK (WHICH PALESTINIANS, FOR REASONS
OF THEIR OWN, ALSO VALUE). JUMBLATT, WHO IS PUSHING HARD
FOR AN EDDE ADMINISTRATION, SEES 'ARAFAT (AND POSSIBLY
THE USG) AS THE MEANS EITHER OF WORKING OUT MORE COMFORTABLE
RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIA OR KEEPING SYRIAN TROOPS
OFF HIS BACK. WHETHER THIS NEW SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES
WILL MAKE HIM MORE MALLEABLE IN APPROACHING LEBANESE
POLITICAL SETTLEMENT REMAINS TO BE SEEN, BUT HE IS AT
LEAST TALKING NOW (IN CONTRAST TO HIS MORE BELLI-
COSE POSTURE WEEK OR MORE AGO) OF HIS CONSTANT AND
ABIDING DESIRE FOR PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF LEBANESE
CRISIS.

6. I BELIEVE WE MUST ACCUSTOM OURSELVES TO FACT OF
PALESTINIAN PARTICIPATION IN LEBANESE POLITICAL PROCESS
AND, THEREFORE, INCLUDE IN THIS ASSESSMENT OF LEBANESE
POSTURES, A BRIEF IDENTIFICATION OF THREE PREDOMINANT
TRENDS AMONG RESIDENT PALESTINIANS.
  A) PLO/FATAH: TORN BETWEEN COMPELLING DESIRE TO
AVOID CONFRONTATION, MILITARILY AND/OR POLITICALLY,
WITH SYRIA AND IMPERATIVE OF AVOIDING CAPTURE OF MOVEMENT
BY ANY SINGLE ARAB STATE (IN THIS CASE, SYRIA), JMARAFAT
HAS BEEN PLAYING CAUTIOUS GAME SOMEWHERE BETWEEN JUMBLATT
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AND DAMASCUS. HIS ANTICIPATED TRIP TODAY TO DAMASCUS
(SEPTEL) INDICATES THAT HE HAS DECIDED TO BECOME MORE
ACTIVE IN HIS MEDIATORY ROLE. WHILE THIS ROLE IS
PROBABLY IMPORTANT TO BOTH SYRIANS AND JUMBLATT,
'ARAFAT CONCEIVES OF HIS MISSION AS A MEANS OF AVOID-
ING A HARD CHOICE BETWEEN TWO LINKS HE VALUES HIGHLY.
WHILE PLAYING THIS GAME AND PURCHASING BOTH TIME
AND ROOM FOR MANEUVER, 'ARAFAT WILL CONTINUE TO
BUILD BRIDGES WITH OTHER ARAB STATES, SUCH AS EGYPT,
TO GET HIM OFF SYRIAN HOOK. I DOUBT THERE ARE MANY
ISSUES IN LEBANESE POLITICAL CONTEXT AT PRESENT (IN-
CLUDING IDENTITY OF NEXT PRESIDENT) OVER WHICH HE IS PRE-
PARED TO FIGHT, BUT HE MUST TACTICALLY GET JUMBLATT AND
THE LEFT OUT OF THE MIRE TO AVOID PRESSURES FOR HIM
TO DO SO.
  B) SA'IQA: SA'IQA, ALTHOUGH CONSIDERED IN OTHER
TIMES AND CONTEXTS A PART OF THE "MODERATE" PALESTINIAN
ALIGNMENT, IS IN PRESENT CASE CLEARLY-IDENTIFIABLE INSTRU-
MENT OF SYRIAN POLICY HERE. WITH IT, SYRIA HAS ALSO
SET IN MOTION PRO-SYRIAN BAATH PARTY, LED BY ASSAM
KANSO, AND ELEMENTS OF PALESTINE LIBERATION ARMY (PLA)
IN WHICH DAMASCUS HAS CONFIDENCE. WHILE SA'IQA'S
OPEN IMPLEMENTATION OF SYRIAN POLICY HAS CAUSED DEFECTION

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OF NUMBER OF ITS LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN ADHERENTS,
THESE LOSSES HAVE BEEN COMPENSATED, IN PART, BY IN-
FUSIONS OF SYRIAN REGULARS AS WELL AS SYRIAN PURCHASE
OF SUPPORT FROM OTHER "FREE AGENTS" (E.G., APPARENTLY
COL. MAMARY OF "LEBANESE ARAB ARMY" IN TRIPOLI, KAMAL
SHATILA, ONE OF MANY NASSERITE LEADERS IN BEIRUT, ETC.)
) "REJECTION FRONT": REJECTIONISTS AMONG PALES-
TINIANS, LED MOST NOTABLY BY GEORGE HABASH OF THE PFLP,
HAVE BEEN THROWN INTO CONFUSION BY INCREASE IN SYRIAN
PRESENCE AND INFLUENCE IN LEBANON BEGINNING LAST JANUARY.
THESE ELEMENTS, WHICH DRAW MUCH OF THEIR SUPPORT AND
INSPIRATION FROM SYRIA'S ARCH-RIVAL IN BAGHDAD, KNOW FULL
WELL THAT THEY RANK HIGH ON DAMASCUS'S ELIMINATION LIST.
HABASH AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAVE SOUGHT WHAT SECURITY THEY
COKLD FIND IN ALLIANCE WITH THE LEBANESE LEFT (FOR
REASONS OF IDEOLOGY) AND IN RECONCILIATION WITH PLO/
FATAH "MODERATES" (FOR REASONS OF EXPEDIENCY). I DOUBT
THAT THE THREAT OF SYRIAN CRACK-DOWN WILL LONG DISSUADE
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THEM FROM ATTEMPTING TO KEEP LOCAL SCENE IN UPROAR AND,
PARTICULARLY, FROM SEEKING TO SABOTAGE SYRIAN EFFORTS
TO PUT LEBANESE HUMPTY-DUMPTY TOGETHER AGAIN.
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